

AUDIT & PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority)

19 November 2020

Present:

Councillors Healey MBE (Chair), Brazil, Buchan, Clayton, Napper, Prowse (Vice-Chair) and Saywell.

* **APRC/33** **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

* **APRC/34** **Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority Financial Statements 2019-20**

* a **Audit Findings for the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority 2019-20**

The Committee considered a report of the Authority's external auditor (Grant Thornton) on audit findings for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2020. An initial audit findings report had been considered by the Committee at its meeting held on 7 September 2020 (Minute *APRC/26(a) refers). Since then, the report had been updated in a number of areas, in particular pension costs and liabilities associated with the McCloud/Sargeant judgment. This had now been addressed as a non-adjusting post-balance sheet event in line with International Audit Standard 10. Additionally, it was clarified to the Committee that the material uncertainty declared by the Devon Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) in relation to property fund investments related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the property market in general and did not have a significant impact on the Authority's financial statements or revenue budget in the short-term.

The audit findings report addressed, amongst other things:

- the audit approach (including materiality in relation to the financial statements);
- commentary on significant audit risks identified in the external audit plan; and
- significant findings.

An unqualified audit opinion was anticipated on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2020. There was no material uncertainty about the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern. In relation to value for money, the Authority had proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The audit findings report also identified that two of the three recommendations identified in the previous audit (relating to the transfer of payroll services; and measures to address the Medium Term Financial Plan funding gap) had been addressed while the third (relating to a wider Protective Monitoring system) was scheduled for implementation in 2020-21 and was considered low risk. No new specific recommendations had been identified during the course of the audit of the most recent financial statements.

(SEE ALSO MINUTES *APRC/34(b) and (c) BELOW).

* **b Statement of Accounts 2019-20**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance & Resourcing (APRC/20/14) to which was appended the final Statement of Accounts for the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2020. A draft Statement of Accounts had been considered by the Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2020 (Minute *APRC/26(b) refers), at which time there were still a number of outstanding issues relating to the external audit – in particular pension costs and liabilities. These issues had been amended where appropriate within the accounts and the Statement of Accounts was now being re-presented for approval.

It was also noted that Regulations made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had altered the publication date for final audited accounts from 31 July to 30 November and that, despite the complications arising from the pandemic, the Authority had provided its draft financial statements to the external auditor on 30 July 2020.

RESOLVED that the Authority's final Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020, as appended to report APCR/20/14, be approved for publication.

(SEE ALSO MINUTES *APRC/34(a) ABOVE and *APRC/34(c) BELOW).

* **c 2019-20 Letter of Representation**

The Committee considered the Letter of Representation (included with the agenda for the meeting) on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2020.

RESOLVED that the Committee Chair and the Director of Finance & Resourcing be authorised to sign, on behalf of the Authority, the Letter of Representation to the external auditor (Grant Thornton) on the Authority's financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2020.

(SEE ALSO MINUTES *APRC/34(a) and (b) ABOVE).

* **APRC/35 Audit & Review 2020-21 Progress Report**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Governance & Digital Services (APRC/20/15) outlining progress made during the second quarter of 2020-21 (April to September) against the approved internal audit plan for that year.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated requirement for the Service to adopt business continuity measures had resulted in the plan being unable to progress in the usual manner. A revised internal audit plan for the remainder of the year, focussing on areas of highest risk, was being prepared and would be submitted to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

The Devon Audit Partnership (DAP) had completed fieldwork on a planned internal audit of the Training Academy, focussed on alignment of the Academy's work to wider, Service objectives, governance arrangements and maintenance of standards. The draft report on this was expected imminently.

During quarter 2 an additional focus had been placed on obtaining updates on outstanding actions from the Service Audit & Review Assurance Tracker. The total number of overdue items in all priority areas continued to decrease, with overdue actions being linked largely to longer-term project work which had subsequently been subsumed into the Safer Together Programme which was progressing on track.

* APRC/36

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service Performance Report: April to September 2020

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Service Improvement (APRC/20/17) detailing performance of the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service ("the Service") during April to September against eight agreed corporate performance measures relating to fires in the home (and emergency response standards to these), fires where people work and visit, vehicle fires; road traffic collisions and sickness absence performance. The performance status of each reportable measure had been established from analysis of performance against the previous year and medium to long-term trends. Where a measure was reported as "in exception", commentary on this was detailed in the report providing additional information and analysis and indicating whether further action should be considered.

Positive performance was reported in relation to four the measures (fires where people live; fire related injuries where people work, visit and in vehicles; fires where people work, visit and in vehicles; and emergency response standards for road traffic collisions), with negative performance for fire related deaths where people live; fire related injuries where people live; fire related deaths where people work, visit and in vehicles and emergency response standards for fires where people live.

While the number of fire related deaths was small, analysis over a five year period the majority (30 of 37) were in lone person households and of these 19 were over pensionable age. Age and associated issues were key factors affecting the likelihood of dying from a fire in the home. While a greater proportion of the fatal incidents had an alarm present, the alarm had not been raised more often than for non-fatal incidents which was considered to be attributable to the fact that the victims lived alone. The Service had processes in place (including partnership, self- and third-party referrals) to focus delivery of home fire safety advice to those most at risk and in the 2019-20 financial years had delivered 16,500 home fire safety visits and provided additional fire safety equipment in 10,000 households.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on the ability to undertake home fire safety visits although remote support had been provided. The process of reviewing fatal fires had also been suspended but would be reinstated to ensure continual learning and development of knowledge of community risk across the service area.

Fire related injuries where people live had also increased both over the last year and in three and five year trends. The characteristics of those injured were generally similar to those more likely to die from fire, with age and living alone being factors. A process to ensure continual learning and development of knowledge of community risk within the service area to inform appropriate strategies to underpin the Integrated Risk Management Plan was in place.

Measures were also in hand to fully understand and address issues relating to a decrease in performance in emergency response standards to domestic fires.

In response to questions raised at the meeting, it was acknowledged that there was a sector-wide difficulty in measuring with any precision the precise impacts of Service interventions on community safety outcomes, in part due to the relatively low numbers of events involved and the corresponding disproportionate impact that any increase had on associated performance indicators.

In line with an earlier Committee decision, however, work was in hand to develop more appropriate public-facing indicators for Service performance (Minute *APRC/22 refers).

(SEE ALSO MINUTE *APRC/37 BELOW).

* **APRC/37** **Review of Corporate Performance Measures**

The Committee received for information a report of the Director of Finance & Resourcing (APRC/20/16) on progress to develop new corporate performance measures and targets/key performance indicators for the Service Environmental Strategy.

The Committee had previously established a working party to examine new corporate performance measures at its meeting on 4 March 2020 (Minute *APRC/22 refers). Since that time, the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in Authority membership had impacted on this decision. Additionally, the Authority, in declaring a climate emergency and approving the Service Environmental Strategy at its meeting on 23 October 2020, had tasked the Committee with developing (in consultation with Councillors Buchan and Clayton - the Authority's two Climate Change and Sustainability Champions) targets and/or key performance indicators to enable the Committee to monitor progress against the strategy.

Consequently, the Clerk (following consultation with the Authority Chair and in accordance with Standing Orders) had established a new working group comprising Councillors Buchan, Clayton and Saywell to work with relevant officers in developing new corporate performance measures together with targets/key performance indicators to monitor progress against the Service Environmental Strategy.

In discussing this issue, Members commented that there could be benefit in slightly enlarging membership of the working group to include representation from the Community Safety & Corporate Planning Committee. The Director of Governance & Digital Services agreed to undertake this in consultation with the relevant Chairs and in accordance with Standing Orders.

(SEE ALSO MINUTE *APRC/36 ABOVE).

*** DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.00 pm and finished at 3.15 pm